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ABSTRACT

The local history collection should contain: county histories; city and village histories; state and regional histories; anniversary booklets; company histories; local newspapers; local magazines; genealogies; family albums; diaries; journals, and letters; account books; club yearbooks; school annuals; telephone books, city directories and local maps; and public records. The local history collection should also be suitably housed, easily accessible with a comprehensive catalog and a helpful, intelligent staff. Community members who may use the collection are: staffs of the local newspapers, radio and television stations; professional and amateur genealogists; professional historians; economists; writers; clubs and other community groups; teachers; students; and artists. (MM)

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COLLECTING and using LOCAL HISTORY

ED050759

LI 002 819

by MARCIA MUTH MILLER

illustrated by SHELSTAD TAYLOR

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SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

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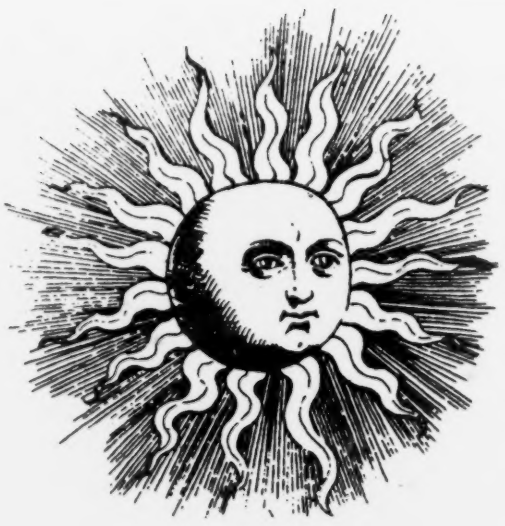

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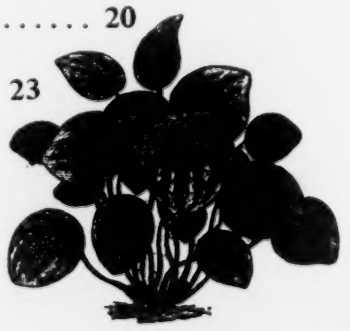

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WHAT IS LOCAL HISTORY

If "history" is that branch of knowledge dealing with the events of a people, period or country and "local" is restricted to a particular place or places, then "local history" is the history of a particular geographically circumscribed area.

In a civilization that thinks in terms of vastness, the continuing significance and importance of local history is too often overlooked in favor of larger fields. Yet, local history is the one aspect of history that is closest to most individuals.

Local history is an account of your life, your family, your neighbors, your town, and county. It is impinged upon at various points in time by the events that are happening just outside.

If no man is an island, also no place is an isolated entity. Wars, economic conditions, good or bad, revolutions, both political and economic, all have their effect upon the local scene. It is impossible to totally escape the imprint of the larger scene upon the smaller.

National history is only one side of the coin; turn it over and there is local history. In some ways local history comes closer to telling the true temper of the people in relation to the world in which they lived or now live.

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Some people have criticized local history on the grounds that it is written by amateurs rather than trained historians. This is true, but it is true because too often the professional historian has been scornful of the local scene or, if not scornful, at least neglectful. The amateur historian is often, however, as well trained in methods as the professional. This seems to be increasingly the case as the general level of education has risen.

The writer of local history, be be an amateur or an accomplished professional, brings to his task an enthusiastic zeal that gives that special flavor to the finished product.

This is not to deny that there may be bias or prejudice exhibited in some local history. Frequently there is, but the reader should be aware of the background of the author. In most cases, it is wise to consult a number of sources if there seems to be any question of the authenticity of the statements made in a publication.

Local history is not usually a matter of dollars and cents, it is a real labor of love. It is written to preserve some aspect of local importance. It is usually instructive and often entertaining.

Local history is the collective memory of a people and a place. It is truly the most original of source material.

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THE SOURCES AND CONTENT OF LOCAL HISTORY

In any given locality there are almost innumerable sources of local history. Naturally, there will be variations and more or less material available according to the area.

Logically, there will be more material available if you are living in an historically important spot. A town or area in which there was a Civil War battle fought will have more written about it than a small out of the way village.

Again, a town which has been fortunate enough to produce as a native son a man of political, literary, or scientific importance is going to have a certain prominence and be of interest to historical writers.

Areas which abound in natural wonders also have always attracted attention and notice.

Therefore, your sources and content of local history are often determined by your location. You can gauge the approximate amount of material available and the possible quality by the location.

Fortunately in this country a high degree of literary interest combined with a healthy curiosity has produced records of note about places, people, and events. This has not been simply a phenomena of the past but is a continuing effort made daily by individuals, firms, and various community and governmental agencies.

As has been indicated, the sources of local history will vary but most or at least many of the same sources will be available in all areas.

The following list gives some of the possible sources of local history.

COUNTY HISTORIES

County Histories were very popular in the nineteenth century. Sometimes they were patterned on their British counterparts and were quite exhaustive and extensive. They were occasionally written under the auspices of the local historical society. Often county histories were commercial ventures and suspect in their facts. These particular histories often put more emphasis on the leading citizens of the time of publication rather than on the actual historical past. The financing of these books was often done by the individuals who were mentioned in them and had their pictures printed in the volume. Despite these rather obvious flaws, they are still an important source of local history.

CITY AND VILLAGE HISTORIES

These are similar to county histories and have the same virtues and vices attached to them. They too have often been issued for commercial purposes and profit, not for accuracy which of course should be the main force behind them.

STATE AND REGIONAL HISTORIES

These histories are usually written by professional historians or by persons who have been closely associated with professionalism in some capacity which is at least semi-historical in nature. Frequently state histories are prepared by educators and are designed primarily for use as school texts. Such histories are accurate in their facts but often lack color and originality.

ANNIVERSARY BOOKLETS

Usually these are centennial books or booklets but any anniversary may bring on a publication. Here again, the best light is often put on matters which have little import and some things mentioned would have been better to have not been mentioned at all, while still others are presented in a more favorable light than true circumstances would show them. These booklets are particularly good for their illustrations. Interested citizens often contribute photographs that may never before have been published.

COMPANY HISTORIES

Closely allied in scope and make-up with anniversary booklets are company histories. Usually, but not always, the reason for a company history is an anniversary milestone. Since no company exists independent of its immediate environment, the company history will include local history. Again, in these publications, pictures play an important part. In recent years books and pamphlets have been issued by manufacturers, mercantile companies, newspapers and publishing firms and banks.

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

A file of the local newspaper

or newspapers, if there are more than one, should certainly be regarded as a prime source of local history. It is the record of an area and its people that is current at the time things happen. It is necessary to be aware of the partisan quality of most early newspapers for this may influence the way in which some events are reported. In the newspapers are not only articles about current events, but the advertisements are a source of historical information. There are many advertisements relating to transportation and communication. There are notices of elections, auctions, city ordinances and other public and legal announcements. Before the Civil War, advertisements for slaves were carried in Southern papers. Advertisements for runaway slaves appeared in many papers. Much political writing in the newspaper is done in the heat of the moment and needs proper assessment by the historian, but it does show what people were thinking and saying at the time.

LOCAL MAGAZINES

Not every locality is the site of locally published magazines but when a periodical is issued for a local firm, it can possibly be a source of local history. Naturally, the subject of the periodical will determine its local history value. It will sometimes have advertisements from local firms and can aid in pinpointing the location and extent of local businesses. It is a fortunate local community that has had an area historical magazine. This, of course, is an invaluable source.

GENEALOGIES

Genealogical records and family histories whether prepared

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by an individual or a group are valuable sources for local history. Usually much community history will also appear in these books.

FAMILY ALBUMS

Family albums furnish a pictorial record of a locality. Not only photographs of persons, but of local scenes and special events, such as parades or civic celebrations, will be found in these albums. An album will often provide a valuable architectural record of an area. A word of caution though; to be useful, photographs in an album must be dated and clearly identified.

DIARIES, JOURNALS, AND LETTERS

Diaries, journals, and letters are the most personal and intimate of source material. They are colorful and often painfully truthful regarding other people. Daily life, common concerns, economic conditions, religious controversies, war news, and social customs can be discovered in this type of material. Usually it is the better educated and most literate of the community who have kept personal records. Letters, however, may be available from any segment of the populace.

ACCOUNT BOOKS

The business records of a firm acts rather like a diary. Here will be found the record about the early business life of the community. Names, prices, kinds of merchandise and sometimes side comments will be listed.

CLUB YEARBOOKS

Names, places, and special events are memorialized in club yearbooks. Civic organizations, garden clubs, fraternal lodges, and service clubs are among the groups issuing such yearbooks.

SCHOOL ANNUALS

School annuals or yearbooks have a lasting value beyond their immediate interest to the people concerned with any one year. They are a source of information for personal names and dates. The high school or college annual is a reflection of the community educational system.

TELEPHONE BOOKS, CITY DIRECTORIES AND LOCAL MAPS

These are all pinpointing aids, useful in locating a name or place in a definite chronological time or specific geographical area.

PUBLIC RECORDS

Public records, although not usually available in libraries, can not be overlooked. They are another important source of local history and should be called to the attention of inquiring patrons. Public records include such things as census reports, voter lists, abstracts of title, property deeds, school records, commission and council minutes

reports, and similar archival material.

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WHY COLLECT LOCAL HISTORY

Now that the content of local history has been determined, the question of why local history should be collected can be answered.

It is basically a duty for it is a preservation of the national heritage. Perhaps even greater than that, for now that man has gone to the moon and plans to go in turn and time to the planets, local history is a part of the history of the human race on this planet, earth.

Tolstoy wrote in War And Peace, "The subject of history is the life of peoples and of humanity." Humanity for most is confined to their own particular local area.

If this local history is lost, the history of the larger, the national scene or the world, will be seriously deficient in both knowledge and philosophy.

In an age which has become primarily scientific and devoted to the wires and transistors of computers, it is important not to lose the records of the lives of people, the events of locales, and the daily record of human concerns.

Men have dreams and the dream of a better municipal park system is as worthy of preservation as is the moon journey. Local history is the record of the small dreams but they are backed by the same inspiration and enthusiasm that propels men outward on the larger adventures.

Not to keep and know local history is to deny your own humanity.

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WHO SHOULD COLLECT LOCAL HISTORY

The collection and preservation of local history has become the province of local institutions. Specifically, this has meant libraries, museums and historical societies.

Although occasionally material passes into the hands of a private collector, most local history is found in institutions.

This is as it should be, for free and ready access to the material is necessary. Furthermore, most institutions have the means and space to properly care for the collections under their jurisdiction.

Every library should be aware of its local history resources. A local history collection should be developed. When there are several libraries or a library and a museum in the same geographical area, some kind of cooperative acquisition policy should be established and followed.

Libraries by the very nature of their business have an obligation to their patrons to collect, preserve and make available for use, local history. This is not only important for their present patrons, but they must look forward to their patrons of tomorrow.

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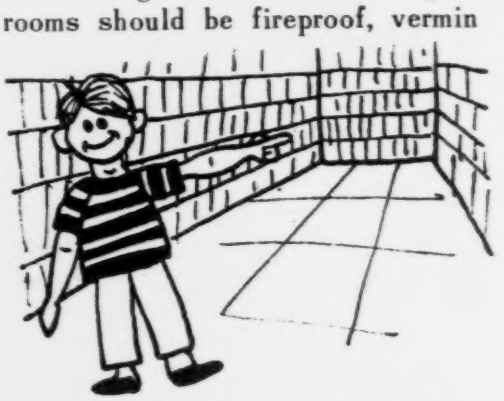
Museums of an historical nature will have a local history collection. A museum, however, may wish to limit itself to a collection of local history artifacts rather than books and other records. That material may then be placed in the local library.

A local historical society has its functions as a collector limited by its physical assets. Obviously, a society without a building or even rooms in a building, will be unable to keep a local history collection. A society may also elect to confine its possessions to historical artifacts instead of written records.

The important thing to remember, however, is that cooperation between institutions, libraries, organizations, and individuals is absolutely necessary for an area local history program. It might be wise to have a Local History Committee to be the administrative agency through which all cooperative programs are channeled. Such a committee could be made up of representatives of the cooperating organizations, professional librarians, historians, etc. and interested lay persons.

This Local History Committee could assume the responsibility for deciding how the various aspects of the local history collection are to be allocated. It may be feasible to assign different interest levels to different institutions. It may prove wiser to have one central location for a comprehensive local history collection.

At least three factors must be taken into account in deciding who shall have custody of the materials. The first is, of course, the very practical one of space. There must be available not only physical space in which to house the proposed local history collection, but it must also be adequate in terms of future growth. The building or rooms should be fireproof, vermin



proof, and with reasonable precautions taken against possible theft and vandalism.

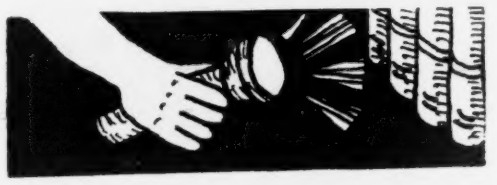
A second consideration is care and maintenance. There must be a staff to process the material and to take the necessary means of preservation for care of the books and

other objects. The staff needs to be prepared to handle the problems that arise from dealing with the public. While a trained professional staff is the most desirable, in some instances a staff of dedicated and enthusiastic non-professional and amateur historians can do the work

very satisfactorily. Perhaps the best staff is a combination of the two - a professional staff aided by a highly organized and competent corps of volunteers. This has proved to be a very successful operation in many museums.

The third factor is availability to the public. A building and a staff are not enough unless the public can use the building and have the benefit of the knowledge of the staff. The building must be in a reachable location. The public should not have to cope with hazards and difficulties such as steep stairs or dark and untidy rooms. Regular hours for public use should be posted and maintained.

Some of these things will not be easy when the local history collection is dependent upon volunteer help and contributions for finances and housing. Too often the only quarters available for the local history collection are those not wanted by other agencies. All efforts should be made though to achieve as close to the perfect situation as is possible.



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THE NEW LOCAL HISTORY

In addition to the local history items that are most easily recognized as such, there are new local history objects. These are new because they are the products of our new technology. They are in different forms from those we have traditionally associated with local history. Their acquisition, preservation, and use is as valid as the older, more usual forms of local history.

Oral history as a form of local history has come into its own with the development of the tape recorder. Now a library of tapes can be built with the actual voices of area residents giving their accounts

of local history events. With the development of the cassette tape recorders, no special technical skill is needed to operate the new machines using the cassettes.

Tapes are also made at the local radio stations and since many do their programs have community interest, there are possible items for a local history collection.

Video tape may also be available in some places from area television stations.

Locally made motion pictures are another source of local history. These may be professionally produced motion pictures dealing with an area subject. More than likely, however, the motion pictures available to a local history collection will be those done by semi-professional or amateur groups. With modern equipment, skill of production is almost assured.

In the face of a continually changing environment due to such projects as urban renewal, the new local history should include a continuing still photographic record. Buildings and neighborhoods are a part of local history. Too quickly they change and in some cases even vanish.

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HOW TO DEVELOP A LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

This chapter will assume that the decision to have a local history collection has been made. The further assumption is made that the additional decision has been taken as to the responsibility for gathering the material, i.e., by a single institution or a committee. For the purposes of this chapter, the imaginary situation will be that of a library in a medium-sized city that has never had a local history collection before as a separate entity.

The first step then is to cull the existing collection for local history items. Such a search should turn up county, city, and state histories. These will be the backbone of the new collection. The biographical and travel sections should also be searched. Obviously, this task should be assigned to a person or persons with a thorough knowledge of the local area. It may be advisable to seek and utilize outside help from people familiar with the local history scene.

Your periodical collections, newspapers, vertical files, and pamphlets should also be thoroughly examined and items of local historical interest transferred to the new collection. You will especially want to be on the watch for pictures, maps, and ephemeral material such as programs.

Depending upon the area, of course, there should also be a search of the fiction collection. If the local area is one important historically, there is a strong possibility that it has been used as a setting in fiction. Fiction should then be included as should be any

drama which is set in the context of the local area or local historical past.

No local history collection would be complete without a section for local authors. Not every town can have one or more professional authors but there is probably no town of any size without its amateur literary figures. Frequently their works, often poetry, will be published locally or by the writers themselves. The artistic merits of these publications are not under consideration. Their right of inclusion is directly related to the residence of their authors.

Once the existing library collection has been carefully examined and local history items removed, the nucleus of the new special collection has been formed.

You may be surprised to see how much local history you already have. From this beginning point, it is easy to move forward in an ever enlarging operation.

The first step is to make a list of desiderata based on what you already have and what you think might be available. This can be ascertained by going over not only subject bibliographies but examining the books in the local history collection for mention of other materials. You may find references to unprinted manuscripts and letters which the author consulted. These may still be unpublished and in the hands of local families.

Once this list has been compiled, the search for the wanted items can begin. Since, except in rare cases, there are usually budgetary considerations it is helpful to try for gifts at first. The best way of doing this is to let the general public know what you are attempting to do. Most newspapers will be willing to cooperate in presenting a feature story about the new local history collection and what is needed. Donors should be assured that their gifts will be suitably noted with appropriate publicity and special book plates. A further reminder should be made that contributions are tax deductible. Arrangements should be made to give letters of appraisal for tax purposes when that is necessary. Special recognition for donors of rare or large collections should be given unless such donors specifically request anonymity.

In addition to private donors, other local institutions such as museums should be contacted. They may have material they do not wish to keep, or duplicate material that they will gladly give up. Sometimes other area libraries, such as college libraries, will acquire unwanted local history material through their own gift acquisition programs.

A public campaign such as has been described will undoubtedly bring results. It is important that this campaign be a continuous one with regular reports on developments made to the public.

The newspaper approach is, however, only one aspect of the means of developing a local history collection. It will be most useful in bringing in older books, maps, diaries, pictures, letters, and other manuscripts. Continuing publicity

will bring in additional material if it is discovered by individuals or other institutions.

Arrangements should be made with local clubs to have copies of programs and yearbooks deposited in the local history collection. Membership lists are also desirable. These clubs should include local service clubs, garden clubs, hobby groups, church-related organizations, labor unions which also serve a social function and fraternal lodge groups.

Local companies and banks should be notified of your willingness to keep copies of any items of historical interest. Many times banks and utility companies will issue booklets or leaflets containing information of special local interest. Be sure copies are sent to the local history collection.

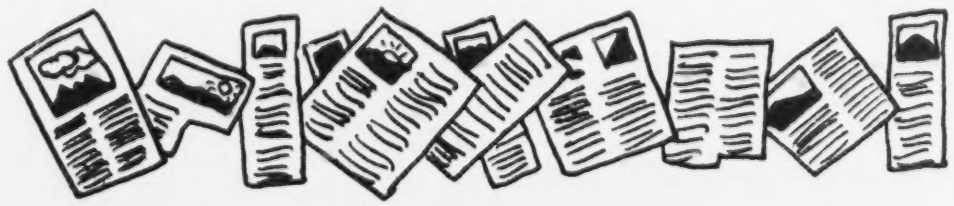
Area radio and television stations should be made aware of your special historical needs. Many times local newspapers are willing to give microfilm copies of their files to the local history collection.

Schools and colleges can be asked to donate copies of yearbooks, school newspapers, and programs of special interest. Copies of term papers and theses which may have a connection with local history should also be added. A file of college catalogs, promotional and informational literature should also be maintained.

In addition to keeping local newspaper files, a clipping file should be set up and kept up-to-date. Area newspapers should be clipped for all items of possible historic interest. These items should include news stories and pictures of local events and special occasions. News pertaining to prominent persons and families should be clipped. Features dealing with local business ventures or land problems should be clipped. All political news relating to local politics should be kept as should all sides of any public controversy. Naturally, a complete file of all published obituaries should be in the files.

The telephone company should be asked to supply copies of area telephone directories.

A constant vigilance needs to be kept on all the possible sources of local history. However, this task will be easier if there is a high degree of cooperation and interest with the various sectors of the local area. Local history, afterall, is everybody's business.



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PRESERVATION OF LOCAL HISTORY MATERIAL

Local history material received by libraries is apt to be in varying conditions. Some material will be pristine, apparently untouched since printed or produced. Oftentimes, however, books and pamphlets will be dog-eared, mildewed, and torn. Covers may be missing or bindings split and ripped.

The first thing to do with older acquisitions is to examine them carefully and see what repairs need to be made. This should be done by a careful individual examination of each book.

Using standard book repair tools and materials as supplied through library supply houses such as Demco and Gaylord will usually be adequate for most repairs.

Books, if dusty, should be gently dusted with a soft cloth. If possible, the original binding should always be kept. Reginding should be done only when the original binding is a total loss.

Old leather books should receive a rubbing of a softner and preservative such as Neat's-Foot oil combined with lanolin. This should be done regularly to prevent the cracking of the leather.

Pages should be carefully examined and mended when torn. Only an approved mending tape should be used. Rumpled pages should be repaired by using special sheets of film designed for this purpose. Loose pages should be inserted into the binding.

A word of caution about cleaning pages - the comments written on a page may in themselves have an historic interest, depending, of

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course, on who wrote them. When pages have to be cleaned, a good grade of art gum should be used with a careful touch. It is best though, to leave the pages untouched, no matter how unlovely they look to their custodians.

Pamphlets, leaflets, and other similar material should be basically treated the same as books as far as mending. When should pamphlets be bound? This depends on two factors. One, how much use will the pamphlet receive and two, how much money is set aside for binding. As a rule, it is possible to take care of this material without the expense of binding. Individual pamphlet binders can be applied or covers removed, put on boards and pamphlet resewen or stapled.

Large, thick paperback books and pamphlets can be treated as bound books and put directly on the shelves. A group of pamphlets on a single subject can be put in a pamphlet box and placed on the shelf.

Leaflets, small pamphlets and single sheets are probably best cared for in a vertical file. They should receive the same care that is taken of books. Rare and fragile items should always be laid in protective papers and not be in contact with other material.

Newspapers are fragile and short-lived, they should be handled with care. Neither the papers themselves nor the clippings should be exposed for long periods to strong sunlight or artificial light. Clippings when not in use should be kept in vertical file folders or envelopes.

Binding money is perhaps best spent for the binding of periodicals. If they are not bound, some other provision must be made for keeping them together. They should be put in boxes or tied in bundles.

Microfilm, microprint, and microfiche are all desirable, but they are also expensive. The expense must include not only the microphotography but the essential equipment to enlarge, project, and read the film, card, or sheet. If the budget permits, these are solutions to material storage problems. In turn, they present their own storage problems on a different scale. Proper care must be taken if microfilms and the other microphotography media through adequate dustproof and humidity controlled storage files and cabinets.

Maps should be stored flat. It is worth the expense to order a map storage cabinet in which to keep them. They should be kept in repair, tears mended promptly with transparent mending tape.

Special cases are also available for storing motion picture films, tapes, and cassettes. Where such special cases are not available, the regular vertical file cabinetes can be used, although these are not as satisfactory. Temporary storage units can be improvised out of boxes. For example, cassettes can be stored in shoe boxes.

Unbound genealogies, diaries, letters, and journals should be bound if funds are available. If not, they may be placed in folders, spring binders, notebook covers or tie binders.

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Photographs and negatives should be placed in individual protective envelopes. If transparent envelopes or folders are used for the photographs, it will eliminate unnecessary handling of the photographs themselves. There is then less possibility of damage from dust and fingerprints. Negatives, however, should be placed in opaque envelopes to minimize damage by light.

In general, care and repair should be the watchword of the local history collection staff. This is extremely important since so many of the materials are fragile and one of a kind. People will have less hesitancy in giving gifts to the local history collection when there is the assurance that gifts will be properly cared for and housed.

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CATALOGING LOCAL HISTORY

Cataloging, classification and indexing are absolute necessities. An uncataloged local history collection is just a mixed bag of miscellany.

The question or which particular cataloging scheme should be used is closely connected with the location of the collection. If it is a part of a larger collection, i.e., a special collection in a library, the cataloging will have to be compatible within the framework of the larger system. A local history collection which is a totally independent unit, can be cataloged under any system that the staff chooses to use. It is probably wiser and more economical to adapt an existing system than to attempt to invent a totally new one.

Local history cataloging and classification are very specialized in nature. The cataloger should always keep in mind the particular uses and qualities of the collection.

Indexing is a prime tool in making the resources of the local history collection known and available to patrons. Time spent in indexing is time saved in research.

All books should not only be cataloged and classified, but they should be subject analyzed as well. The extent of this analyzing will depend upon the accuracy and depth of the book's own index if one has been made. Certainly each book should be examined to see what additional material needs to be pinpointed for patrons. It may be reference to a specific chapter in a book, perhaps only a few paragraphs. Personal and place-names,

particularly if they are not readily found elsewhere, need to be listed.

Individual periodical articles should be indexed for subject, names, and places. Personal and place-names are very important in local history and should never be overlooked in indexing.

All maps, pictures, films, and tapes should be cataloged and indexed. Clippings are useless unless they are also indexed.

The results of this detailed cataloging and indexing must be gathered into some usable tool. Future generations may use computers exclusively but for now, a dictionary catalog will have to be the prime finding tool.

A dictionary card catalog has an advantage in its expandable design. It can be added to without too much trouble. Unlike book catalogs which are out-of-date as soon as issued, card catalogs can be as current as filing practices permit.

Assuming, therefore, that a dictionary card catalog has been decided upon as the main coordinating center of reference information, the next question to be answered is the number of catalogs. Some libraries keep separate files. Thus, one catalog will be a record of books by the usual subject, title and author divisions. Another catalog will contain the index to the pictures of the collection; a third catalog, the subject guide to the clipping file; a fourth, the periodical index and so on for as many catalogs as the time and ingenuity of the staff will allow.

Time, however, does impose certain limitations and so does the patience of the library patron. A multiplicity of catalogs may be a joy to the beholder but it can be a nuisance to the searcher.

A divided catalog, author-title and subject, into which have been combined all the cataloging and indexing assets of the local history collection is recommended. Why a divided catalog? It has been demonstrated that it is quicker and easier to use a divided catalog. Patrons, particularly in special fields of interest, find a divided catalog less confusing and more convenient to use.

Putting all the subject cards in one catalog and all the author-title cards in another shortens the searching time. A patron wishing to know what the resources of the collection are for a particular local place does not need to consult several catalogs but only one - the subject catalog. Here at a glance he can tell what is available.

For example, let us suppose that Mr. Patron wishes to find out more about the X Bridge in town. When was it built? Who built it? Why was it put in its particular place? Consulting the subject catalog under the heading X Bridge, Mr. Patron finds several cards. One card refers him to a chapter in a book on the history of the town. Another entry refers him to a page in a popular travel book. Two more cards are for periodical articles. There is a card indicating that there is a folder of pictures of the bridge. Apparently there was much interest in the bridge at the time it was built for there are extensive references to newspaper articles.

Mr. Patron is really jubilant though when he comes across a subject card for a taped interview with an old timer who helped build the bridge.

Had our patron been looking up a person, he would also have consulted the author-title file to see if that person had written any books, diaries or letters which might be in the local history collection.

Undoubtedly the subject catalog is going to get the greatest use. It makes sense then to have a complete, comprehensive subject index to all the resources of the collection in one location. For the staff, it can also be used as a way of testing the comparative strength of the collection in its various areas.

Individual cards can be marked FILM, MAP, MICRO, GEN, PAM, or any other suitable designation that the staff chooses. These letters can be used in conjunction with any classification scheme. For added easy identification, a colored line on the top of the card can be used to distinguish the different kinds of material.

The particular kind of cataloging, classification and indexing is not important. What is important is that these elements be consistent and comprehensive. The catalog is the key to the collection.

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THE USE OF THE LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

A local history collection suitably housed, easily accessible, with a comprehensive catalog and a helpful, intelligent staff is still not complete. Like a play, it needs an audience. How is this collection going to be used? Who is going to use it?

Staff members should remember that only a proportion of their duties are custodial in nature. Yes, they have to be alert to the care and preservation of the material in the collection, but these things are there to be used by people.

People with special interests will always come. They may or may not be scholars in the traditional sense of the word. They will usually be patrons with a reverence and an enthusiasm for local history. Professional historians, economists and writers will all use the local history collection when they need it.

The staffs of the local newspapers, radio and television stations will be users of the local history collection. Both professional and amateur genealogists will be frequent users of the collection.

Clubs and other groups will turn to the local history collection and its staff when preparing papers and booklets.

Teachers in the local schools will depend upon the resources of the collection. College students will use the material for research papers. Artists will search the collection for illustrative material.

What about children using the local history collection? Some librarians are horrified at the thought of little fingers and busy hands touching their precious

acquisitions. Children, however, have an innate respect for history. They have also the kind of curiosity about things that should delight the heart of any research librarian.

Some understanding and appreciation of local history by children is necessary for a future, informed and interested adult population.

How are all these possible patrons reached? A good public relations program is necessary. Obviously, people won't come to a local history collection if they don't know it exists. They also have to know where it is and when it is open for public use. These vital statistics should be well-known in the area served by the collection.

A local history column in the newspaper is a very effective way of publicizing the local history collection. A local history radio program is an equally effective method. Opportunities to appear on television are probably limited unless there is a public-spirited local station or an educational station in the area. School or college closed-circuit television may offer some good opportunities to present aspects of local history.

There should be close cooperation between the staff of the local history collection and the school systems of the area. Not only should individual students be given assistance, but arrangements should be made for class groups to visit the collection and be made aware of what is available.

Programs by the staff should be prepared and offered for club meetings, church groups, civic organizations and school assemblies.

The local history collection should be an integral part of the community. It should be the first place people turn to when they need information about local affairs or history.

The local history collection should be a continuing source of pride and inspiration to the community. It is the mirror of community hopes and activities, both past and current.

Local history is not solely the past, is not a dead issue. Local history is alive and living in your area. Record it in words, pictures, and sounds.

THE AUTHOR

Marcia Muth Miller, born at Fort Wayne, Indiana and educated at Indiana University and at the University of Michigan. She received a Master of Library Science degree from the University of Michigan. A former law librarian at the University of Michigan Law School and the University of Missouri Law School, she has also had experience in public library work as a reference librarian and cataloger. Mostrecently, Miss Miller was associated with the NewMexico State Library where she was Head of the Southwest and Rare Book Room. A professional writer, she is now employed by Ellis Research Associates in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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